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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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The Platypus Review

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Introduction to negative dialectics

Angela Davis

Installation view "1 Million Rosen für Angela Davis"
with: Heinz Wodzicka, Angela Davis, 1972
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Introduction to negative dialectics

IN THE SUMMER OF 1967, Theodor Adorno offered a seminar to invite discussion on his recently published Negative Dialectics. Angela Davis, encouraged by Herbert Marcuse, was studying with Adorno in Frankfurt at this time and presented this paper at that seminar. The piece itself, according to Oskar Negt,[1] was well received and provoked an "informative discussion" between her and Adorno, who had agreed to supervise Davis' doctoral research before she ultimately decided to return to the United States in order to join the political developments happening there at the time.[2] This essay, along with much of Davis' work and correspondences, now resides in the Radcliffe Institute's Schlesinger Library at Harvard University. We are grateful to Angela Davis for permission to translate and publish this text for the first time.

Our translation aims to treat the essay as a historical document and to maintain a fidelity to Davis' German, which the reader will note has a quality of foreignness to it. The reason for this textual opacity is twofold. The first can be explained biographically: Davis wrote the remarkably dense essay at the age of twenty-three years old in her second foreign language after French. Her German demonstrates a command of just how well-suited the language is to the construction of complex sentences with multiple clauses, a characteristic that proves as difficult as it is useful. The second reason is attributable to her close reading of Adorno's style, which deliberately evades a totalizing, systematic elaboration of concepts. This approach, namely that of immanent critique, renders its object partial and unresolved so as to force the reader to reflect upon its incomplete status in relation to a philosophy that exists negatively, after its moment of realization had been missed.

If, in the end, the Hegelian system relates everything to the Absolute in which time is "erase[d],"[3] it nevertheless determines the path to truth, to absolute knowledge as a temporal development of differences and thus elevates the new, the alien, the not-yet-conceptual to a necessary component of the process of knowledge: as its moment. By contrast, the presently dominant scientific "frame of reference" ideology aims at a spatial, static order in which all facts are given their clearly defined place. Whereas for Hegel time is the condition, the medium as well as the *constituens* of truth, today thinking testifies to the inability to endure that which has not yet been apprehended. Nietzsche's critique of causal thinking applies also to the administered world: "To derive something unknown from something familiar relieves, comforts, and satisfies, besides giving a feeling of power. With the unknown, one is confronted with danger, discomfort, and care; the first instinct is to abolish these painful states. First principle: any explanation is better than none."[4] The reified consciousness stamps everything non-tautological as vertiginous [*schwindelerregend*] and thereby means to prove its untruth: that alone is true which comfortably agrees with the predetermined coordinates. Thinking in alternatives provides something "to hold on to,"[5] a calmness of a worldview and model, and the security of the previously established knowledge of decisions already made.

The simplifying determination through alternatives and "frames-of-reference" extinguishes the truth of the self-being [*Selbstsein*] of the objects, since all those moments which do not contribute to the satisfaction of the subject's need for security are eliminated.

The thought of the radical other appears negative because it represents an affront to "formal thinking" which makes "identity its law."[6] Philosophical reflection reveals the inadequacy and falsehood of such a conception of knowledge. Hegel's critique of "healthy common sense" also emphasizes the fear of the unknown as an essential moment—that is, of the truth of philosophical speculation—which undermines the absolute, fixed, finite knowledge of the understanding. The "relative identities of common sense" are "contingencies for philosophical reflection."[7] The speculative resolution of the healthy common sense leads finally to the sublation [*Aufhebung*] of the differences between subject and object and ends in the "nullification of consciousness itself... in the night of pure reflection" that is the "noonday of life" for speculation.[8]

Negative dialectics does not search for a higher identity, a totalizing identity of identity and non-identity in which the latter disappears. Thought, which aspires to become knowledge, must accept a moment of blindness—"must throw itself to the object *à fond perdu*"[9]—if it is not to end in delusion. The unknown, as the driving moment of knowledge, is not to be thought away. The vertiginous must be understood as an *index veri*, insofar as a resistance against the tendency to lock away knowledge in a circle of repetition is registered in it. The vertiginous can neither be established in a frame of reference nor sublated in absolute knowledge. It is the subjective reaction to that which refuses to be systematized.

The rejection of the scientific procedure of frame-of-reference as well as of philosophical systematics in the traditional sense does not negate their respective intentions. The observation that the system as such inhibits knowledge does not thereby imply the abandonment of stringency as an element of truth, nor of objective criteria which the philosophical system believed it had secured in the abstract. Whereas the system looks to impose truth on the objects from above, negative dialectics aims at truth that is to be developed out of the objects themselves. The force generated and absorbed by the system is directed at the singular, concrete phenomenon. The impossibility, recognized by negative dialectics, to dogmatically assure its ability to fully grasp the truth of its objects is the real consequence of the thought that truth must be sought out in the concrete. Failing to recognize this and remaining in a fixed certainty, negative dialectics would make itself an accomplice to Hegel's thesis that the concrete is spirit in itself. As philosophy, negative dialectics searches neither for axioms nor an ultimate ground; on principle, it does not look to complete itself. Negative dialectics lives in the constant realization that the object it tries to conceptualize does not disappear in the *concepts rei*. By seeing through the hypostasis inherent in idealism and ontology, negative dialectics strives for a way of thinking that, by constant self-reflection, remains conscious of its conceptual nature and thus of its relation to the non-conceptual. Even formal logic is inconceivable without a "something," even in the most abstract form, to which the propositions refer. Every philosophy that posits thinking as sovereign or that, by nature of its approach, implies the objective primacy of thinking obstructs its own access to truth. An example of such a philosophy is vulgar materialist epistemology, according to which thought merely reflects external reality and thereby absolutizes its concept.

The immersion in the non-conceptual in the object with the aim of drawing out its truth is made more difficult by the fact that thinking, as a "thinking of something," must in principle identify its object in order to be able to recognize it at all; the reduction of the particular to its—general—concept determines the character of thinking. Constantly identifying, thought must fix, immobilize, hypostatize, rob the object of its temporal truth. For thinking that knows there is no royal road to truth—aside from the untruth of hypostatization—the inner-dynamics of truth must necessarily appear fragile. Fragility in this sense is not synonymous with the dialectical-speculative concept of truth. According to this concept, truth constitutes itself as a break, an eternal break—broken by the necessary explication in the medium of time—and therein preserves its absolute essence and its timeless character. Truth is inherently fragile because it is inherently temporal. The conceptual representation of the object must therefore be thought of as divided against itself, and it is this division, as a movement that dissolves everything solid, that creates the vertiginous feeling in reified thinking, in thinking caught up "in the state of perfect indifference [of] security,"[10] that simply brings together truth and stasis as one. The static only enters dialectics as a moment, which otherwise would be absolute—and thus itself static—movement.

Even Kant, whose *Critique of Pure Reason* wanted to erect a "permanent residence,"[11] admits to a certain extent the fragile nature of truth: in the criticism of teleological judgment, Kant observes that "the particular, as such, contains something contingent. And yet reason requires that even the particular laws of nature be combined in a unified and hence lawful way... It is impossible to derive the particular laws, as regards what is contingent in them, a priori from universal ones [supplied by the understanding]."[12] However, throughout the concept of purposiveness, which functions as a regulative principle, a lawfulness is subordinated to contingency which is subjective, but ultimately just as necessary as if it were objective. By consistently upholding the primacy of the object, negative dialectics does not consider itself, as knowledge, to be covered a priori by any necessity—for the simple reason that, as Kant demonstrates, universality and necessity can only be justified by a subjective construction.

The fragility that philosophy has to face is not to be confused with relativism, for which objective truth is entirely obsolete. Relativism is the prototype of the groundless philosophy for fundamental ontology but cannot, however, be criticized with its categories. This would mean thinking in bad alternatives. There is also no middle path to be found between the two; dialectics immanently criticizes the two extremes. In an immanent criticism of relativism in particular, its groundlessness presents itself as all too well-founded. If every individual consciousness, as a monadological bearer of particular interests with its own opinions, is allowed to make an equal claim to truth, then that narrow-minded "indifference of security" of healthy common sense that Hegel criticizes in the *Differenzschrift* follows precisely. This indifference is a direct function of the particular interests which are taken to be true against the truth itself. Relativism hypostatizes a moment in a process which, in reality, also contains the mediating universal as a determinant. The relativism that speaks in favor of the particularism of opinions and interests is itself relative in relation to the laws that rule society and which, through their opacity, have become the secret absolute, the *deus absconditus* of relativism. The behavior of the individuals who have to assert themselves in the market is already determined by this. However, this in no way sanctions a higher degree of relativism, as it is found in Pareto and Manheim's thesis that the individual is conditioned by class, generation, status group, occupation, etc., as ultimately irreducible factors, as social realities. Objectivity does not arise, as Mannheim thought, from the summary of all perspectives but rather from insight into the laws, which in turn make those perspectives and points of view possible first and foremost: the laws of life in bourgeois society. The doctrine of relativism, which generally boils down to a confirmation of the existing, functions within bourgeois society as a kind of defense mechanism against the immanent destructiveness of the bourgeois concept of reason. This bourgeois concept not only dissolved medieval ontology, the form of reflection of the feudal order: its insight that the spontaneity of thought constitutes the order of the real also secretly contained the demand that freedom should be realized in a rationally organized society. The enchantment of private property, which in its immediacy of recognized as natural—that is, as it were, as an ontological reality [*Seinsbestand*]—prevents the sublation of bourgeois consciousness through a potentially more advanced consciousness contained in it. The individual is invariably determined by blind causal laws, while freedom is assigned to an intelligible sphere that does not allow any influence on the phenomenal world. Relativism and ontology are related to one another insofar as the latter

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by revealing it as appearance, as immediacy that has forgotten its mediation. If, however, the negative power of thinking is asserted as the universal principle of everything that exists, of the object as well as of the subject, it becomes exposed to the objection of hypostatizing itself as the immediate. This strength of thinking, which takes precedence in Hegel, is retained in negative dialectics, but only in the meaning of a moment. Precisely by its inclination to assert its absolute autonomy, thinking has a critical potential. Kant's concept of understanding as the structuring force of the world of appearances implicitly turns spontaneity into resistance against the power of the factual, of mere being. As soon as thinking is conceived as absolute, as soon as the existent becomes the example of spirit, its critical potential evaporates. According to Hegel, the individual, insofar as he is spirit, has to submit to social institutions as the higher form of himself.

This form of the dialectic in Hegel, which affirms domination, is already evident in the sphere of speculative logic. The primacy of the concept has the consequence that it exceeds its function as an instrument, as a means, and thus as a necessary moment of stability that is required if knowledge of the non-conceptual is to be possible. The concept becomes an end in itself when the non-conceptual is identified with the concept of the non-conceptual. Being can pass into nothing, since it is found as indefinite in the concept of the indefinite, as indefiniteness, and thus assimilates itself to empty thinking, nothingness, thinking of indeterminacy.[13] The tendency of thinking towards absolute autonomy can only be stopped by self-reflection, whereby subjectivity, trusting its own illusory stability, is condemned to be free-floating as long as it does not recognize that it is itself mediated by something objectively immediate.

Dialectics insists on the objectively immediate against any obligation to dynamics—mere movement without any measure for a judgment about this movement. It is against the combination of dynamics with absolute calm, with ontology. For this reason, the experience of immediacy without the conceptual apparatus cannot be completely denied and disqualified as an atavistic behavior. The truth of so-called primordial experience, the *données immédiates*, lies in the emphasis on the non-tautological character of knowledge. Absolutized, immediate experience gets cut off from knowledge just like the absolutized concept. Intuitive knowledge, claimed by a consciousness whose power essentially consists in conveying what is immediately given, would be just as illusory as intellectual intuition. The objectively solidified—the second immediacy produced by society—can only be released through the liberation of that which is subjectively solid.

The sterility of knowledge, which does not break through the barrier of subjectivity, which does not experience the vertigo of the object, can only be corrected through the primacy of the object. "Surrendering oneself to the object" means the loss of the absolute validity of subjectivity in favor of the truth of the object. The thesis of the priority of the object must, of course, not be used in an indiscriminate manner, because that "priority of the object," as it is hypostatized by the ethos of scientific rationality, which declares the subject to be a "disruption factor" insofar as it is unobjective, is directly opposed to dialectics. In contrast to science, which only knows the subject as an exchangeable entity that fulfills no other function than that of a neutral vessel in which truth is supposedly received, dialectical cognition demands an "increase in subjectivity."[14] The vessel is actually a preconceived method; the subject, deprived of all special characteristics, becomes itself a method. This idea of scientific experience has its social correlate in the meaning of the subject as an arbitrarily exchangeable factor; provided that they are adequately educated, every individual should be able to produce truth. Science is democratic; it does not require any special privileges. The predetermined being of scientific truth, the fact that "reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own plan,"[15] means a mutilation of the idea of experience. In general, the same process presents itself as one of the progressive integration of the individual, who in fact only experiences what can be tolerated and enclosed by the static dynamics of society.

The privileged character of philosophical experience is thus negatively evoked by society; "[o]nly a mind which it has not entirely molded can withstand it."[16] The capacity for philosophical experience is contingent in relation to the social totality—a stroke of luck. Just as individuals are, as it were, the irritations of society whose individuality is not entirely determined by the objective order of things, and just as individuals who are therefore open to real experience represent irrational sprinkles in the structure of society, thus the thesis that philosophical experience requires more than just the epistemological derivatives "receptivity" and "understanding"—namely the "qualitative subject" and not its "transcendental residue,"[17] measured against the standards of social and scientific rationality—is irrational. The contingent nature of this privilege—even the privilege itself—is canceled out [*aufgehoben*] by the objectivity that philosophical experience gains in representation. The index of its truth is not only that the subject, by consistently speaking its own, as it were, non-everyday language, speaks the forgotten better language of all, but also that philosophical experience makes visible how in a better general state, the privileged experience itself could become general. The "freedom to the object" would be supplemented by what is for the time being viewed as "too objective," according to the objective order of things. Only the destruction of the hypostatization of method, of pre-formed objectivity, would allow the individual to grasp objective truth in the medium of his own, particular, subjective experience.

Only something similar has the power to recognize something similar. The knowledge of qualities presupposes a subject who, as radically one, subjects his thinking to a kind of quantifying subsumption and thus applies the dominion over the object to himself. The knowledge of qualities, on the other hand, presupposes that the subject, insofar as it is able to surrender itself to the object, transforms this relationship to the object into specific subjective ways to react. It has to bring its imagination, its ability to associate, into play. Abstract or quantitative subjectivity, whether it is the pure "I think that must be capable of accompanying all my presentations" or the passive, empirical events in a collecting vessel, cannot develop the specific psychological ways to react that are necessary to conceive objective qualities. This is not the same as regression to prescientific-animistic stages. Qualities are objectively present beneath the surface of the quantified object; in view of the quantitative over-determination, it is not so much the qualities that represent a projection in the animistic sense as the universal quantifying procedures which are an expression of subjective, nature-dominating rationality. Exchange value, the prototype of quantification, obscures the use value of goods, but without use value, exchange could not become concrete. On the other hand, the qualities that are ignored and veiled by spatiotemporal determinations can only be perceived in the medium of their spatiotemporal determination. The mimetic element of knowledge does not exclude the rational, and the rational does not exclude the mimetic. The classificatory function of quantification is constantly corrected, controlled, and critically changed by the mimetic elements of subjective experience. Knowledge becomes a process of differentiation.

The affinity of subject and object has never been entirely given up, not even in subjective idealism. According to Kant, the imagination plays a decisive role in the genesis of knowledge: there is need of "a pure imagination, as a basic power of the human soul which underlies a priori all cognition,"[18] of a productive imagination, which alone, because it is intellectual and sensual at the same time, can provide the schema, i.e. mediate between categories and the world of phenomena. Without a remnant of mimetic ability, without the "blind but indispensable function of the soul without which we would have no cognition whatsoever, but of which we are conscious only very rarely,"[19] intuitions could not even be subsumed under concepts. Detached from the transcendental-logical context and transferred to the level of the individual, the results of productive imagination, in the sense of the capacity to differentiate, are not a priori necessary, because they are not the product of a synthesis of categorical form and pure manifold. The consequence of this contingency, however, is an increase in critical power to confront the predetermined categories with their untruth. The faculty of differentiation as a faculty of the concrete individual separates the fate of the individual in his dialectical entanglement with the universal. Because the individual is mediated through supra-individual moments, without which he would cease to be an individual, he is not only contingent. Without a moment of reflection, through which the individual articulates his condition and realizes himself, he would be incapable of asserting himself against the universal: his individuality would be entirely undetermined. Analogously, there are ideas, associations, fantasies without the objectifying strength of reflection, and without power in the face of strictly rational knowledge. Therein lies the fatality of Bergson's strict dualism between intuitive and rational knowledge. The particularity of the individual, with his specific diagnostic function, his faculty of differentiation, is, in the critical sense—measured in the tension between the supra-individual and the rational—the expression of the wish to overcome the contradiction between the universal and the individual. This overcoming would not totally annihilate the universal, but indeed reconcile it with the particular. In opposition to the 'extorted reconciliation' of the Hegelian universal, negative dialectics attempts to individuate knowledge, whereby the function of objectifying the qualitative aspect of the particular falls to the universal.

With its aspiration to individuate, knowledge has to abdicate itself from the traditional concept of method to avoid falling back on the deceptive principle of *prima philosophia*. "[The] method must constantly do violence to unfamiliar things, though it exists only so that they may be known. It must model the other after itself. This is the original contradiction in the construction of freedom from contradiction in the philosophy of origins."[20] The intention of Hegel's "true method of philosophical science" as the "consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content of logic"[21] is to move beyond the necessary contradiction between method and things. Method and content are in dialectical speculation only insofar as they're identical, as the dialectical movement of self-contradiction is fixed as an ontological determination; the inner self-movement of content remains the projection of the self-movement of form. Consequently, according to Hegel's concept of method, as he formulates it at the end of Logic: method "is soul and substance, and nothing is conceived and known in its truth unless completely subjugated to the method; it is the method proper to each and every fact because its activity is the concept."[22] Negative dialectics, which does not set its own movement as the determination of things, cannot evade the methodological reflection of its relationship to its concrete execution. Its relationship to the social totality is methodical. Insofar as this really appears in the analysis of phenomenon, the misunderstanding is emphasized, not the congruence. Negative dialectics proceeds negatively, to show that the illusory character of unmediated particularity is, in fact, something truly socially mediated, but to its disadvantage. Simultaneously, its relationship to the Universal is negative. Thus mediation through the universal is the last end of the exchange; far from it, to express the inner qualities of the single phenomenon is the compulsion to achieve identity through suppression. The objectivity in which the particular is captured is neither the true objectivity (i.e. true universality) nor the truth of the particular.

Philosophical experience cannot claim to be in possession of the particular in its pure objectivity, that is, as a non-identity, provided that it cannot also be grasped as an expression of the whole, nor can it bind together the whole. Precisely because it knows that the individual phenomenon extends into other layers of meaning than those that are imposed on it by the force of the universal, philosophy in particular must recognize its telos without being allowed to fall into the illusion that it can directly ascertain the particular. For this reason, the philosophical experience of the particular is not a-methodical, but methodical. To observe concrete phenomena methodologically (i.e., in accordance with the rules of formal logic) means to violate the rules in the form of contradiction. Since the concrete in its particularity is not merely divorced in the sense of a deviation from the social totality, it is crucially incommensurable, unassimilable, and non-identical with the latter. It indicates the antagonistic character of social reality. The compulsion, through which negative dialectics is methodically bound, is a compulsion against compulsion, which is both a hindrance and a potential of the identity between method and things: a hindrance, insofar as it itself is the product of the suppression of the particular. Negative dialectics does not critique through this non-identity of method and content, but is presupposed by it. Negative dialectics stands as a compulsion against compulsion itself under the condition of compulsion. This is also the only way to the true identity of method and content, insofar as it isn't defined by a resistant submission, but rather is directed against the universal, always accompanied by the utopian promise that someday the latent layers of the particular will be graspable. The real work of philosophy, of concrete analysis of particular phenomena, should as much as possible dissolve the method in the interest of the priority of concrete objects. "The precedence of the matter shows as a necessary insufficiency of the method." Method is indispensable, but at the same time should be imperceptible, the way Hegel claimed concepts worked, namely as "pure observation."

Sartre's program of existentialism has intentions which, to a certain point, run parallel to negative dialectics: he tries to dispense with the transcendental and declares war on the generalizations and idealistic tendencies of philosophy through their direct confrontations with concrete human existence. Subjective freedom and inalienable, absolute spontaneity are proclaimed to be the defining force in human existence. Freedom manifests itself in the decision, in the specific objective environment where the subject is situated, meaning it gives "every event in the world can be revealed to me only as an opportunity (an opportunity made use of, lacked, neglected, etc.)."[23] Events, or situations, are merely conditional opportunities for decisions, for the exercise of freedom. The decision itself is, on the other hand, constitutive of the situation, meaning the situation gains meaning for the individual only when he is concretely engaged in it. As such there is no qualitative difference between differing concrete circumstances. Every conceivable situation is nothing more than an instance for the operation of an unchanging, ontological, determination, determined by the consciousness of the unmediated given. The allegedly concrete determinations get mixed up in even those idealistic essences, against which Sartre polemicizes. His conception remains formal because the 'situation' is only a prototype, an idea of all possible situations that conform to a general conceptual schema and its general consequences.

Sartre's concrete individual is the model of the transcendental subject that can only follow its own rules, and so the real existing power relations are doubled. "The absolute subject cannot get out of its entanglements: the bonds it would have to tear, the bonds of dominion, are as one with the principle of absolute subjectivity."[24] The potential of determinate resistance in the individual is thwarted through the claim that resistance in the form of a freedom of decision will always be achieved: the individual constitutes thereby an external reality, which is always chosen. The concept of bad faith implies that the individual can, at best, choose a predetermined alternative. The question of the effectiveness of the alternative itself never comes up.

If subjectivity, understood as the individual ability to grasp the particularity of an object, is given particular significance, the danger of falling into total objectlessness arises, as is the case with Sartre, or confusing differentiated knowledge with arbitrary projections of the subject. This can only be avoided by the constant struggle to allow the object to dictate the direction. The spontaneity of the subject must become a struggle to decipher the selfhood of the object. The archaic, magical power of names achieves this height through a nearly unmediated identity; it is in the most emphatic sense the expression of the object. Because of its fetishized nature, it cannot provide philosophy the answer it searches after. "Unity before and after the separation is not the same. Through separation, identity and non-identity crystalized their roles, without once thinking of themselves as unified."[25] Philosophy cannot renounce the aspiration of calling objects by their name; instead of the unmediated name, not broken by reflection, it employs constellations of exact concepts in order to name and to recognize one another, in order to escape the delusion of the name: the aura of immediate identity with the object.

The concept is not the radical other of the object, as it might appear to be when it is confused with its name. Also, the particular is, as Hegel showed, already conceptually mediated before the attempt to capture it from the concept. The τόδε τι is itself a universal concept, which is supposed to express the singular existence of the here and now: that "this" can also denote a "not-this." Hegel's critique of sense certainty accordingly comes to the conclusion that if each individual can be designated by a general concept, then the truth of the *res singularis* must be that of its mediation through the universal. Whatever unmediated being can be in the here and now, is so in the medium of consciousness.[26] Mediation becomes the "remainder after accomplished subtraction."[27] Contra Hegel's treatment, we must remember that particularity can replace the non-particular. Conceptual mediation of the τόδε τι is not to be confused with its reduction to a universal (*conceptus communis*). It is, rather, "the point of attack for conceiving its nonconceptual side," because the graspable mediation, which the single phenomenon in itself is, i.e. the manifestation of an aspect of its non-identity, is its "implicit history."[28] Non-identity is, therefore, not only an unmediated, final substrate of mediation, but rather the becoming of the thing under specific historical conditions. In contrast to the idealist dialectic, which understands immediacy as a transitory moment within a process, the completion of which is the speculative concept, negative dialectics, as one with the materialist dialectic, uses this temporal mediation in order to demarcate the inadequacy of the concept. What is mediated through the labor of thought or the objective activity of social labor, does not come to a definitive conclusion in the concept or in the product of labor, but rather remains crucially as an ensemble of unrealized possibilities: "The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is possibility—the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one."[29] Even with utmost precision the concept is not capable of determining the object altogether in its inner historicity. For this reason representation is a crucial element in philosophy. Only through reflection of the deficiency of concepts is philosophy able to correct their inclination towards stasis. The antidote against the stasis of objects is conceived of through incessant self-reflection, objectified in constellations of concepts, whose selfhood they should express—therein lies the only possibility to name an object in the process of its being-known.

The "sedimented history" of the singular phenomenon is its mediation and communication in the concrete historical process. Rationally and empirically oriented directions of philosophy rejected such knowledge that had not radically abandoned such historical elements. Descartes advocated the conviction that the external authority of tradition, which is manifested in customs as well as in generally accepted, unquestioned scientific views, can only be dissolved by what is immediately present to the mind in clear and distinct thoughts. Bacon's empirical method is not far from this. Evidence is no longer purely an event in thought, but is rather ascribed to the unmediated presently observable facts, which, like with the Cartesian ego, are absolutely split off from their historical references. The Idols, which limit knowledge in the same way customs limited Descartes' observations, investigations, and opinions, must be destroyed, in the interest of validity of empirical research.

A critique of this type of absolute traditionlessness does not equate to an unreflective confirmation of tradition. Tradition, affirmatively received, is incongruent with the promise of the knowledge of truth. But the abstract negation of tradition fails to recognize the factual roles traditional-moments play in knowledge. In Kant's apparently ahistorical epistemology a trace of the historicity of knowledge is preserved, albeit in a highly formal guise. The transcendental apperception, whose "principle is the supreme one in the whole of human cognition,"[30] as the epitome of form, is dependent on the synthesis of the transcendental power of imagination as the production of ideas which are not immediately present in thought. The dependence of transcendental apperception on time gives it an extremely sublimated historicity. Knowledge is not just formally mediated through history. It is precisely the mediation of its content, the moment of tradition, that makes it possible for knowledge to penetrate the "implicit history" of the present. The uncritical resignation of tradition does not protect thought from irrationality, but paves the way for it, by ignoring the concrete affinity between thinking and its object.

"However, while tradition is subjectively broken or ideologically corrupted, history objectively continues to have power over everything that is and into which it has infiltrated. That the world has been added together from that which is merely given, without the depth of what has become, that positivistic dogma...is as illusory as the authoritarian appeal to tradition."[31] History, which is objectively present in the here and now, asserts itself as a compulsion over the subject, who cannot see through the semblance of solidity and historicity of what is immediately given. An uncritical stance towards history—to see its abstract negation as its affirmation—bestows upon the traditional a falsely transcendental status; it becomes constitutive for knowledge, without being seen through. "Recurrences become tradition solely through that which unrelentingly falls short,"[32] that is, in the determinate negation of tradition. Philosophy is the preservation of tradition through its negation, the preservation of philosophical text is the medium of the critic, who measures against her own intentions. Without the traditional moment in philosophical experience, interpretation, understood as the unlocking of an immanent meaning, which simultaneously reveals that which is immediately present in the object of interpretation, would become impossible.

The consequent ban on tradition further implies an iconoclastic relationship to language as the product and manifestation of tradition, which for this very reason preserves the possibility of transcending an immediate present. The current positivistic assertion that every metaphysical problem—those which cannot be solved by the natural sciences—can be attributed to the incorrect use of language assumes an ideal concept of language and grasps it as merely an instrument whose signifying process is totally separated from any emphatic linguistic representation. The effort to free language from all traditional elements, and thereby divest it of its rhetorical character, would render language (in an extreme case) a mere system of signs. Such a dubious relationship to objects is characteristic of the attempt to ban traditional meaning-values from language; in an attempt to bring itself closer to them, it creates an unbridgeable gap between the two.

Through the history of philosophy, rhetoric has been seen as an art of persuasion, the ability to influence the mind by means of mere words, regardless of their truth or validity. Gorgias shows that rhetoric has been far more capable of convincing the ignorant than the experienced. By grasping rhetoric as an essential moment in representation, negative dialectics accentuates its critical difference from reality, from that which exists; it uses rhetoric in order to express a meaning that lies hidden beneath the surface of the immediate, given the secret affinity of language to things. "In philosophy, rhetoric represents that which cannot be thought except in language."[33] But unlike the orator or the demagogue, it does not claim the unmediated reality of what it expresses, which in so doing would condemn itself to ideology. The persuasive character of rhetoric negates itself in the fact that it is mediated through the truth, not through the reality of what is communicated. As rhetoric, language transcends its merely signifying function, in order to be a concrete expression of the historical mediation of thought. Through language, negative dialectics tries to break out of the dilemma of knowledge and mimesis. The affinity of language to that which it signifies is able to break free from the compulsion of repetition, of sameness. The unknown and the unexperienced, held concretely as a possibility and expressed with the aid of rhetoric, opens up thinking to a utopian dimension. **|P**

Translated by Dane Thomas and Andrew Christopher Green.

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[1] https://www.ethecon.org/ethecon/jaehrliche-preisverleihungen/preisverleihung-2011/grusswort-prof-dr-dr-hc-oskar-negt/

[2] Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 145.

[3] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 462.

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), 497.

[5] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), 33.

[6] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 745.

[7] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 99.

[8] Ibid., 103.

[9] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 33.

[10] Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, 100.

[11] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Cambridge: Hackett, 1996), 664.

[12] Ibid., 287.

[13] Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 66–67.

[14] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 48.

[15] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 19.

[16] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 41.

[17] Ibid., 44.

[18] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 170.

[19] Ibid., 130.

[20] Theodor Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, trans. Willis Domingo (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 12.

[21] Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 33.

[22] Ibid., 737.

[23] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press,1993), 556.

[24] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 50.

[25] Karl Heinz Haag, "Das Unwiederholbare," in *Zeugnisse. Theodor W. Adorno zum 60. Geburtstag. Im Auftrag des Instituts für Sozialforschung.*, ed. Max Horkheimer (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1963), 160.

[26] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 81–86.

[27] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 52.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 248.

[31] Theodor Adorno, "Thesen über Tradition," in *Ohne Leitbild. Para Aesthetica* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 33-34.

[32] Ibid., 41.

[33] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 55.

Bridging theory and practice

An interview with Angela Davis

Erin Hagood and Duyminh Tran

On December 7, 2020, Erin Hagood and Duyminh Tran interviewed Angela Davis via Zoom. Davis is a political activist, author, and academic whose work has focused on issues of race, class, and feminism. What follows is an edited version of their discussion.

Duyminh Tran: Could you give us a brief overview of how you became interested in Marxism?

Angela Davis: I can tell you that it seems that I was primed by the social environment of my childhood to be receptive to Marxism. My parents had a number of friends who were members of the Communist Party. As a very young child, I had no idea what that was, but I'm certain that the ideas that were instilled into me by my mother had something to do with that. I just can't tell you exactly how.

I do know that when I attended high school in New York in Greenwich Village at The Little Red School House/ Elisabeth Irwin High School, a good number of the teachers had been blacklisted because of their political affiliations and beliefs. As a matter of fact, because they were not allowed to teach in the public school system in New York, the teachers created a cooperative school based on the experiments in progressive education by a woman named Elisabeth Irwin.

My history teacher was a Marxist. At the age of 15, I seriously read *The Communist Manifesto* as a document we were studying in our class. Due to my parents' connections, I was active in the youth organization of the Communist Party when I was very young. Embracing Marxism came rather naturally. It wasn't a result of a *prise de conscience*, as one might say — it just happened organically.

DT: On the topic of your graduate studies, what were the reasons you decided to go to Germany to study with Adorno?

AD: I had been studying French literature as my undergraduate major. In the course of studying French literature, I came across quite a number of writers who were also philosophers such as Sartre and Camus. I realized that, while I was extremely interested in the literature and the aesthetic dimension, I was more interested in the philosophical underpinnings of the ideas. I didn't realize this until I was a senior. I had spent a year in France studying at the Sorbonne. Marcuse, who was teaching at Brandeis University at the time, had been away my sophomore year, and I was away my junior year. I had heard him speak and was looking forward to taking classes with him during my senior year. When I explained my predicament to him, I told him that I was very interested in continental philosophy. At that point I was primarily interested in the existentialists. As a result of my studies in France, I had been reading a lot of Sartre and Camus, as well as other phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty.

I told Marcuse that I was interested in philosophy but did not possess a foundation because I had never even taken an introductory course to the history of philosophy. And then, on the spot — I was in his office hours at the beginning of the first semester of my senior year — Marcuse said, "Well, let's study philosophy!" For that entire quarter, I met with him weekly to discuss texts from the pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, Schopenhauer, Locke, and others. He then told me that I would have to take his graduate seminar on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was quite frightening because I had only begun to study philosophy. How could I possibly participate in a class with graduate students who had probably been studying philosophy for many years? But I overcame my fear, took the seminar, and Marcuse called upon me to give the first paper of the seminar.

That is basically how I got hooked on philosophy, but I should point out that I was not really interested in the analytical philosophy that was most popular at that time. What captured my interest was critical theory, which was the approach taken by Marcuse and the Frankfurt School of philosophy — a philosophy applied in an interdisciplinary context as it might assist in the process of changing the world. Marcuse then suggested that I study with Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas, who was a young professor at the university at that time. It turned out that was exactly what I was looking for.

Erin Hagood: Oftentimes when young people read the history of this period in politics, the philosophy of people like Sartre or the members of the Frankfurt School is often counterposed to the Old Left communists. Those seem to have been two traditions that both influenced you. Could you speak to how what you learned in the Little Red School House and from the communists related to what you learned by reading Sartre and studying with Marcuse and Adorno?

AD: I don't think that there was such a clear division at that time. Of course, there was the up-and-coming New Left as exemplified by the *New Left Review*, for example, which I read during the 1960s. At that particular time, even though I was close to people who were members of the Communist Party, I identified more with the emergent examples of Left theory, politics, and activism that the French intellectuals espoused.

One of the reasons I felt drawn to France was because of the political engagements of public intellectuals. I did not, at that time, consider myself a proponent of the so-called Old Left, but it was always a part of my environment due to my family and friends. I remember that, when I was studying in Frankfurt, I actually went to East Germany because James Jackson, a prominent figure in the U.S. Communist Party, was there for a meeting. He was a very close friend of my parents, and I continue to be friends with his children. His wife, Esther Jackson, was also a major figure. She's still alive and is 104 now. She was the editor of *Freedomways* and did a lot of political work in the literary world. Politically, I was drawn to what I considered to be the more radical instantiations of Marxism than to the Communist Party, which I tended to associate with my parents and older generations.

EH: We would like to ask you about your experience with activism in the 1960s and eventual participation in the Communist Party. In your autobiography1, you talk about your experience in the Black Panther Political Party and the criticisms you had of many groups with which you worked such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. What ultimately brought you to the Communist Party? What did you learn from your experience in the Black Panther Political Party during that period?

AD: Initially I was a member of the Black Panther Political Party, one of the many organizations that took on the designation Black Panthers from the Lowndes County Freedom Democratic Party, whose symbol was the black panther. Then I was a member of LA SNCC. Finally, I joined the Communist Party and shortly thereafter the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (the Black Panther Party with which we are all familiar today). My decision to join the Communist Party, first of all, had to do with a sense of an important lack in the other organizations that I had joined. While I was passionate about black liberation, I've always sought a commitment that embodied interrelations and connections.

I can remember, even when I was growing up in Birmingham, that although white people were certainly racist, we had to be able to reach them because workers' struggles were important. I suppose I absorbed some of these ideas from the Communists in my social environment. Therefore, having worked with so many black organizations such as the Black Youth Alliance, black student groups, and the Black Panther Political Party (which ran candidates at the time), I understood that black liberation had to be viewed in the context of a broader meaning of freedom.

Two of the people I became close with as I worked in the Black Panther Political Party and LA SNCC, Franklin Alexander and his wife, Kendra Alexander, were members of a formation within the Communist Party called the Che-Lumumba Club. This was a black club within the Communist Party that was not entirely accepted by the larger leadership structure in New York. However, it was accepted by the Communist Party leadership in California as an important way of participating in the black liberation movement while embracing the class struggle and developing a Marxist analysis.

It was actually related to a very specific experience I had as an activist, when SNCC was dismantled because of disagreements regarding the part that women should play in the struggle and specifically their eligibility for leadership roles. Women who were nominally in the leadership of LA SNCC but were not permitted to publicly represent the organization at press conferences, rallies, etc., demanded to be acknowledged because we were actually doing most of the actual work — as is usually the case in movement and other organizations. We also demanded to be recognized as spokespersons. This tension within the organization also had to do with who was a Marxist and who wasn't. The internal tensions finally led to the demise of the organization.

I've always been someone who needs collective contexts, but my organization fell apart as a result of these internal struggles over gender and politics. Kendra, Franklin, and Franklin's older sister Charlene Mitchell invited me to consider becoming a part of the Che-Lumumba Club in Los Angeles. I was so impressed by the work that they were doing that it seemed like an opportunity to have collective reflection and input. It was also an internationalist organization that addressed local, national, and global issues.

EH: You state in your autobiography that you reflected on how your philosophy was connected to your politics. In your essay "Marcuse's Legacies,"2 you note that the difference between Adorno and Marcuse seemed to hinge upon how their ideas related to the activism occurring during the 1960s. Could you tell us why you felt their disagreement was significant and what those ideas meant specifically for your politics during this period?

AD: That's a very interesting question. I never quite thought about it in that way but thanks for posing it. I did learn a great deal about working within the context of contradictions. I really appreciated Adorno's analysis. I loved his lectures, read his works voraciously, and had conversations with my student friends in Germany about his work. On the other hand, so many of us were utterly critical of him for his failure to recognize that it was possible at that moment to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Marcuse was actually doing this. He was doing his philosophy and working within the realm of ideas, but also participated in the radical movements of that era. He spoke at rallies, advised activists, and engaged in reflections on activism in his writings of that era. By contrast, Adorno's position was basically that the revolution we wanted should have already happened. However, it did not happen due to major flaws in the theory. He believed that our role at that time was to deeply immerse ourselves in theory so that we could generate a theoretical framework capable of producing successful revolutionary activism.

Many of us felt that this stance did not reflect the dialectical approach on which he himself always insisted. He saw his work as dialectical. How could one divorce theories and praxis, ideas and activism in that way? In Frankfurt, we had many conversations about the value of Adorno's work that also helped us to develop an immanent critique of his stand with respect to activism. I'm thankful for the fact that you posed the question in those terms, because I never quite thought about it that way. Your formulation of the question highlights what I now consider to be an important feminist method — working within the very tensions defined by relations of contradiction. Although I did not see myself as learning how to work within the context of contradictions, this is precisely what I was attempting to do. When I joined the Communist Party, I was extremely critical of a number of issues related to the party. However, based on the experience I had in Frankfurt, I realized that it was possible to be engaged and active while simultaneously remaining critical.

I see this as a feminist stance. The capacity to dwell within contradictions and render them productive is an important element of feminist methodologies. I'm recognizing now that I had encountered dilemmas that required that insight in the late 1960s when I was studying with Adorno.

EH: What do you mean by rendering contradictions productive? What might be an example of rendering a contradiction productive in political activism?

AD: As Audre Lorde wrote, "Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic." This methodology eschews the usual approach to contradiction, which is advocacy to choose one pole or the other. Let's take a contemporary example. I'm extremely critical of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris for numerous reasons. They aren't the candidates we need to lead the country in a radical direction, but I'm not going to wipe my hands of them and do nothing, an unfortunately popular position. I think that it's possible to be critical while simultaneously recognizing how important it was during this last election to get rid of looming fascism by voting against its proponents. Biden and Harris definitely don't represent the path we need to take in this country, but they do represent the possibility of creating a more open political terrain where activist support of more radical trajectories can play out, even in opposition to their political positions. If we learn how to work at the heart of this contradiction, we may be able to push for those changes that the Biden/Harris administration opposes.

EH: In a talk you gave in 2008, you noted that many of the collective demands of the 1960s have transformed into individual benefits in the present. In retrospect, did the New Left's studies of Marx prove adequate to the task of grasping historical transformations in capital such as, for example, changes in the meaning of race, the economic decline of the black working class, and the post-industrialization of the Midwest, in order to effect political change?

AD: The impact of neoliberal ideology has tended to emphasize and further embed the already destructive idea that the individual is the primary unit of society. The paradigm is the individual on the capitalist market. I believe that, in that lecture, I spoke about how affirmative action was intended to uplift entire communities of color and women but was misconstrued as an individualistic solution.

The project was never about individuals. It was always about communities. It has been difficult to create a popular discourse that could help people realize the importance of distinguishing between the individual and the collective. At least, in 2020, perhaps half of the country finally acknowledges that we do need strategies that address structural and systemic racism. It's not about a particular individual's capacity to become the first to accomplish something. It's about uplifting entire communities and attempting to extricate them from the structural problems that have persisted since the aftermath of slavery.

As socialists and the Left more broadly have developed over the past few decades, there has been a pervasive tendency towards reductionism. One might look, for example, at Bernie Sanders and his notion during the previous election that racism can be addressed by attending to its economic dimensions. Jobs for all will end racism. To a certain extent, I think he is right, and we have to embrace these solutions. At the same time, Sanders fails to recognize the particular dynamic of race and racism. Cedric Robinson pointed out that capitalism, from its outset, has always been racial capitalism as a result of colonialism and slavery.

Those inheritances are still with us. Over the last period, the reductionism of what came to be called the New Left has abated somewhat, but there are still vestiges of this tendency to declare that the overarching problem is capitalism, while ignoring the urgency of opposing racism and misogyny. There is an assumption that all one has to do is solve the problems of capitalism in order to fix racism, misogyny, and many other issues that continue to be inaccurately characterized as special interests. Criticisms stating that attempts to address racial or gender issues are divisive have proven to be absolutely incorrect. We are in the process of reimagining what it means to challenge racial capitalism and struggle for a socialist future. Questions of race, gender, and ability all have to be centered.

We could have a very long conversation about this, but I just want to point out that the longstanding failure to embrace a feminist analysis of capitalism and the role of reproductive labor disarmed a great number of traditional Marxists who didn't want to disturb the notion that the (white) male proletariat is the incontestable agent of change in history. Nowadays, we are seeing an entirely different global economy with women and girls participating in the manufacturing sector. Some of the most progressive unions have recognized that they have to change their approaches. The failure to acknowledge these material changes signals a need to rethink the theoretical framework.

This is one of the things I really appreciate about critical theory. One not only uses these conceptual methods to try to understand the world but must also constantly question the conceptual apparatus. One must ask: why am I using this tool, this concept, this particular theory, this method? How does that change the outcome of what I am trying to learn? How do changes in the material world have an impact on my theoretical framework? **|P**

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[1] Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 2013).

[2] Angela Davis, "Marcuse's Legacies," in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, ed. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 43-50.

"Social democracy," cont. from page 2

[2] Matt Karp, "The Politics of a Second Gilded Age," *Jacobin* (Feb. 17, 2021) and Chris Cutrone, "The End of the Gilded Age: Discontents of the Second Industrial Revolution Today," *Platypus Review* 102 (2017–18).

[3] Daniel Joseph Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," *American Quarterly* 39:1 (Spring 1987), 7-26; Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1907* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917 Revised Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992; orig. publ. 1959).

[4] The best transatlantic history of social democracy and its philosophical correlates is James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[5] Sheri Berman, *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); see also George Lichtheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study* (New York: Praeger, 1965), 278-300. For a critique of social democracy see Adam Przeworksi, "Social Democracy as Historical Phenomenon," *New Left Review* 1/122 (July-Aug. 1980): 27-58.

[6] Richard W. Fox, "The Paradox of "Progressive" Socialism: The Case of Morris Hillquit, 1901-1914," *American Quarterly* 26:2 (May, 1974): 127-140; Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: Norton, 2000), 85-124, 167-202.

[7] Sally M. Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973); Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 110-12; Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994; orig. publ. 1952), 86-87, 102.

[8] Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann and the Progressive Era, 1900-1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); Walter E. Weyl, *The New Democracy: An Essay on Certain Political and Economic Tendencies in the United States* (New York: MacMillan, 1912), chap. 12, quote at 188.

[9] Irving Howe, *Socialism and America* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985; first publ. 1977), 32, 35.

[10] For examples of that tendency see Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, "The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74 (September 2008): 3-32; Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle eds, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[11] James Livingston, *Pragmatism and Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 99.

[12] Karl Marx, *Capital* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing Co., 1959), Vol. III: 427, 428; J. W. Mason, "Karl Marx and the Corporation," *Jacobin* (Jul 5, 2020) https://jacobinmag.com/2020/07/karl-marx-capital-corporation-production-socialism.

[13] Martin J. Sklar, *The United States as a Developing Country: Studies in U. S. History in the Progressive Era and the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chap. 1, 2, and 7; Livingston, *Pragmatism and Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940*; Richard Schneirov, "Socialism and Capitalism Reconsidered," and Sklar, "Thoughts on Capitalism and socialism: Utopian and Realistic," in *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 2 (Fall 2003), 352-60 and 361-76. In *Transcending Capitalism: Visions of a New Society in Modern American Thought* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006) Howard Brick shows how key American academic social thinkers, including Sklar, developed in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century "a postcapitalist vision" in which American society was no longer viewed as capitalist or driven by economic imperatives.

[14] Barrington Moore Jr. points to some of the hybrid forms of feudalism and capitalism on the road to modernity in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); see also Charles Maier, Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[15] Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* ([1914] Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1961; orig. publ. 1914), 45; for a prescient appraisal of the postcapitalist possibilities latent in the corporation see his chap. 3. For similar contemporary observations on the importance of the corporate transformation see Thorstein Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1921), William English Walling, *American Labor, American Democracy* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2005; orig. publ. 1926), John Dewey, *Individualism, Old and New* (New York: Capricorn, 1962; orig. publ. 1929), and Adolf Berle and Gardner C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933).

[16] Edward Chamberlin, *The Theory of Monopolistic Competition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933).

[17] For the case against the idea that our economy is uniformly "capitalist," a usage arguably originating in neoliberal triumphalism, and against the idea that the economic sphere necessarily determines the social and cultural spheres see Fred Block, "Varieties of what? Should we still be Using the Concept of Capitalism?" *Political Power and Social Theory* 23 (January 2012): 269-291; J. K. Gibson-Graham, "Waiting for the Revolution, or How to Smash Capitalism while Working at Home in Your Spare Time," *Rethinking Marxism* 6:2 (Summer 1993), 10-24; and Aileen Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion, 1890-1917: Aspects of the Intellectual History and the Historiography of Three American Radical Organizations* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 55-85.

[18] Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 30-38; Thomas K. McCraw, "Competition and Fair Trade: History and Theory," *Research in Economic History* 16 (1996): 185-239.

[19] David Brody, "Workplace Contractualism: A Historical/ Comparative Analysis," in *In Labor's Cause: Main Themes on the History of the American Worker* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 221-50; David Montgomery, "Machinists, the Civic Federation, and the Socialist Party," in *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 48-90; Joseph A. McCartin, *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-21* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[20] Martin J. Sklar *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[21] Alan Brinkley, "The New Deal and the Idea of the State" in Fraser and Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*, 85-121.

[22] Michel Kalecki, "Political Aspects of Full Employment," *Political Quarterly* 14 (Oct. 1943): 322-330; James Livingston, *Against Thrift: Why Consumer Culture is Good for the Economy, the Environment, and Your Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 40-62, 211-29; Przeworksi, "Social Democracy as Historical Phenomenon."

[23] Martin J. Sklar, "Periodization and Historiography: The United States considered as a developing country," in *The United States as a Developing Country*, 33-34; for an argument that such a cross-class hegemonic coalition characterized the New Deal see Thomas Ferguson, "Industrial Conflict and the Coming of the New Deal: The Triumph of Multinational Liberalism in America" in *Fraser and Gerstle, The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*, 3-32; more generally see Matthew Schneirov and Richard Schneirov, "Capitalism as a Social Movement: The Corporate and Neoliberal Reconstructions of the American Political Economy in the Twentieth Century," *Social Movement Studies*, 15:6 (2016): 561-76. The theoretical basis for cross-class movements transacting fundamental change is laid out in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 2014; orig. publ. 1985).

[24] Sklar, "Periodization and Historiography," 19-20.

Social democracy, the mix, and the problem of the labor metaphysic

A response to recent articles by Chris Cutrone and Matt Karp

Richard Schneirov

IN 1947, C. WRIGHT MILLS, the celebrated intellectual father of the New Left, was part of a group of New York intellectuals, including Irving Howe and Louis Coser, who thought it possible that a CIO-led labor movement would play the transformative role assigned to it by Marx. Specifically, they held out the hope that labor would exit the Democratic Party and through a third party become the engine that would pull the United States toward European-style social democracy or even the kind of socialism envisioned by the Trotskyist parties. When it became clear that this was not about to happen, Mills was profoundly disillusioned. In his influential "Letter to the New Left," Mills wrote of "the seeming collapse of our historic agencies of change" and wondered why "some New-Left writers... cling so mightily to the "working class" of the advanced capitalist societies as the historic agency or even as the most important agency, in the face of the really historical evidence that now stands against this expectation. Such a labor metaphysic I think, is a legacy from Victorian Marxism that is now quite unrealistic." To be sure, Mills did not give up the game. He pointed to new agencies of change, calling attention to the passionate worldwide protests he witnessed among the "young intelligentsia." Since that time, skepticism that the working class has an inherent drive toward socialism, has pervaded the New Left.[1]

Mills' antique labor metaphysic, however, seems to be alive and well in two articles I've been asked to comment on by Matt Karp from *Jacobin* and Chris Cutrone in *Platypus Review*.[2] Both articles display the familiar lineaments of the labor metaphysic: the Old Left tenet that Marxism can be understood as a faith in a coming socialist future powered by the vaunted dialectic, an impersonal force riding above history. Each article in its own way is profoundly ahistorical, despite occasional references to historical events. Each collapses the considerable differences that emerged cumulatively between the late 19th century and our current period. Most egregiously, both articles erase the difference between the classical liberalism of the Gilded Age and the revisionist socialism and modern liberalism that emerged during the first half of the 20th century. Each ends up by contrasting that unchanging liberalism with left-wing, presumably transformative politics. Thus, for Chris Cutrone the rise of social democracy in the early 20th century "still accorded with classical liberalism" and "the essential political predicament of liberal democracy in the industrial era remains." In other words, we are still in the Gilded Age. For Matt Karp too, we reside in a Gilded Age characterized by "mass inequality," partisan polarization and identity or cultural politics, which blocks the way to class-based politics. Like many in the recent socialist revival, Karp assumes that if Democrats would only direct their appeal toward workers, typically blue-collar white workers, more exclusively and effectively, their special inner potential would be activated and produce a reliably left-wing base for the Democratic Party.

Mills' reference to the "labor metaphysic" having a 19th century provenance is worth examining in more depth for it illuminates the weaknesses of the philosophical and ideological foundation on which it rested. Victorians were pre-modernists who believed in a predictable universe based on natural laws, a benevolent God, and the conviction that humans could know a set of fixed and unified truths about all aspects of life. It relied on a dichotomy between what was human and what was animal—the latter characterized by instinct, passion, and uninhibited sexuality. Civilization required restraint and uplift by suppressing the animal component in human nature. Victorians transposed this binary distinction to human civilization by defining higher stages as civilized and lower as savage or barbaric. Victorians used the same binary to define the differences between male and female with the male, representing restraint of passions and rationality and the female exhibiting a passionate character and closer to nature.[3]

The followers of classical laissez-faire liberalism and the orthodox followers of Marxism (though not Marx himself), as well as believers in Darwinian evolution, all shared this belief in fixed natural laws governing human affairs, however much else they may have differed in the content of those laws. They also shared an unquestioned faith in human progress proceeding from lower to higher stages.

Modernism, which succeeded Victorianism, was an attempt to overcome binary thinking and formalistic thought with its fixed laws and faith in certainty. Modernism was premised on a universe in flux, and in such an unstable world there could be no absolute doctrines, values, or ethics; nor could progress be assumed to proceed from lower to higher. Modernists viewed such stable foundations as illusions and emotional crutches, which needed to be set aside. To take several examples: in the arts, this meant the attempt to recover the animalistic and instinctual; in philosophy modernists turned to pragmatism with its dictum that all knowledge arises from experimentation and is provisional; in anthropology modernists revalued cultures once termed "savage" and "barbaric" with their new belief in cultural relativism; in psychology, modernism came in two stages, first, Freud's mapping of the unconscious, which undermined the Victorian ideal of the "rational man," and later with the post-Freudian search for "authenticity"; and in the field of history, modernists refused to worship at the altar of America's "antique" Constitution, abandoned the faith in an automatic progress, and turned from political to social history.

The Marxian revisionism of Eduard Bernstein in Germany, Jean Jaures in France, Sidney and Beatrice Webb in England, and Richard T. Ely and Walter Rauschenbush in the United States was a modernist attempt to rethink and update the socialist project. In Europe that meant rethinking Marxism. What became known as revisionist socialism and after World War II social democracy, sharply challenged the orthodox version of Marxism that pervaded the Second International. The dissenters rejected the precepts that: 1) working people were fated by capitalism to live at a subsistence level; 2) that conditions were worsening; 3) that the middle class was disappearing leading to the polarization of society into two hostile classes, a working-class encompassing the great majority and a tiny capitalist class; and 4) that capitalism was inexorably headed toward an internally-generated breakdown, which together with a class-conscious working-class, would pave the way to the replacement of capitalism by socialism.[4]

The revisionists whether in Germany, France, Britain, or the United States, had pragmatic alternatives to the Victorian doctrines of classical Marxism. In place of objective "laws" that guaranteed capitalist breakdown and a clear path to a socialist terminus, the revisionists substituted a flexible capitalism and need to navigate the contingencies of a democratic process; and instead of class consciousness and class struggle, they substituted a growing awareness of social interdependence among all classes. Underlying this rejection of the economic laws of historical materialism was a new conviction that knowledge should be grounded in experience, that economic determinism was superseded by social and political primacy, and in a new ethics, guided by a recognition across society that the liberal goal of individual self-development could not be achieved in isolation but only in the context of social cooperation. Though revisionists were far from being liberals, they did not seek to abolish capitalism's class system, its laws protecting private property in the means of production, the size and reach of the trusts, or transcend wage-labor. The new capitalism was here to stay. Revisionists still believed in socialism, but they did not believe its triumph was inevitable, nor would it be achieved through the class struggle.

For Sheri Berman, the premier historian of European social democracy, the revisionist-modernist critique of orthodox Marxism and classical liberalism cleared the way for the three main political ideologies that contended for power in the twentieth-century: social democracy, revolutionary socialism or Communism, and revolutionary nationalism or national socialism, exemplified in Europe by fascism and in many Third World revolutions in the mid-20th century. Each rejected the determinism of the economic and emphasized the primacy of politics in constructing the good society. Each ideology borrowed from the other two and often implemented the policies of its rivals.[5]

When European capitalism fell into crisis in the 1930s, the attraction of social democratic policies grew irresistible. These policies included a welfare state, support for unions and collective bargaining, regulation of the market activities of business, and the use of deficit-financing to counter depressions and job losses. Each could be engrafted onto capitalism, thus changing it in important, sometimes fundamental ways but without abolishing it altogether. Notwithstanding the fact that these policies originated in the socialist camp, it was fascist Italy and Nazi Germany that first implemented social democratic solutions to the Great Depression, and conservative parties, sometimes in conjunction with social democratic parties, implemented the post-WWII settlement in Western Europe. Only in Sweden did the revisionists fully triumph within their socialist party during the interwar period and implement social democratic policies on their own. Since the last decade of the 20th century, it has become clear that social democracy has been the most successful political ideology and political program of the twentieth century, notwithstanding the short-lived success since the late 1970s of neoliberal ideology, which is currently in a state of political collapse.

The American social democratic path has followed the European template in having social democratic policies implemented by non-Marxian parties, but distinct in the absence of overtly socialist, Communist or fascist players in its political drama. While each European socialist party had substantial revisionist components, the American party was almost completely the preserve of orthodox Marxism. Closely related to this was the party's relationship with the labor movement. In Europe, whenever revisionists came into conflict with Marxist orthodoxy, they had the support of the unions. Not so in America, where most socialists continued to attack Gompers as "class collaborationist" for his membership in the National Civic Federation. Within the party, Eugene V. Debs and his supporters allied with the dual unionist IWW for a time, which irrevocably alienated the American Federation of Labor (AFL) from the Socialist Party (SP).[6]

Only in Milwaukee under the leadership of Victor Berger was the party able to build an alliance with the unions approximating that of the European socialist parties or the British Labour Party. Alienation of the SP from most of the labor movement left it with a high membership turnover and forced it to appeal to potential members on ideological rather than interest grounds. The relative absence of close ties with the unions also gave intellectuals unusual sway within the party and made it prone to revolutionary gestures without real revolutionary plans or prospects. Because the conditions that would have made revisionist dissent within the party possible did not exist, American revisionism or social democracy would have to take root *outside* the confines of the party.[7]

The major figures of revisionist socialism in the US in the early 20th century—Walter Rauschenbusch, Jane Addams, Walter Weyl, Herbert Croly, John Dewey, and William English Walling—developed their thinking outside the context of Marxism and oscillated between the Republican and Democratic parties until the New Deal. While not overtly socialist, most were acutely aware of organized socialism and Marxism and were influenced by the revisionist critique of orthodoxy.

To take one example, Walter Weyl's immensely popular, *The New Democracy* (1912), was in part a polemic against existing socialism though from a social democratic viewpoint. It was littered with references rejecting orthodox Marxism and revoltionary unionism. It also contained a hefty chapter that aligned him with the revisionists. In it, Weyl rejected "absolute socialism," his term for an orthodox Marxism that claimed for the worker the full product of his labor. Like other revisionists, he viewed that kind of socialism as essentially religious. He recounted and endorsed the revisionists' criticisms of orthodox doctrines, especially the belief that the class struggle would eventuate in a war to the finish between two polarized classes. "The old laissez-faire liberal philosophy is done for," predicted Weyl, "and the old absolute socialism is dying in the embrace of its dead adversary."[8]

Without the discipline of contending for electoral power or maintaining the support of the mainstream labor movement, American Marxist and socialist thinkers retained a sentimental attachment to the Victorian orthodox Marxist myth, including the labor metaphysic. What is known as "Debsian socialism" was largely oblivious to its changing socioeconomic context. As Irving Howe has put it, "the trouble with Debsian socialism was... its failure adequately to grasp, and relate to, the changing nature of "the world as it was, once America passed the formative time of industrial capitalism." And the prime reason for that failure was the American Protestant "tradition of moral testimony, sometimes moral absolutism—with its tendency to reduce human existence to blunt compartments of good and evil," which is often "in deep tension with a democratic polity requiring compromise and entailing imperfection." The American Left continues to harbor an attachment to that thread of moral absolutism in American political culture. To take one salient example: Senator Bernie Sanders and his supporters offer social democratic proposals but use the language and affirm an identity as Debsian socialists.[9]

If we are to avoid metaphysical Marxism and understand the remarkable staying power of social democracy in the 20th century, we need to understand the socio-economic formation, which underwrote its development, while blocking any durable success for its alternatives. Otherwise we end up viewing, as do some historians, social democracy's success as ephemeral and exceptional.[10]

Following the turn of the last century throughout the Western world, all political, economic, and intellectual observers were sure that something significant had happened to capitalism or the business system. In the United States a massive corporate merger wave, the most significant in U.S. history according to business historian Alfred Chandler, increased the number of large corporations from [12], mostly in the railroads, to over 300 in all areas of the economy, especially manufacturing. By 1904 even though corporations made up just 24 percent of manufacturing firms, they controlled 83 percent of all manufacturing capital and employed 71 percent of all wage earners in manufacturing. The merger wave transferred property on a scale unmatched by any previous revolutionary upheaval.[11]

There are two general ways of viewing the merger wave. One way, common to today's Progressives, populists, and most Marxists, is to focus on its impact on business *scale*: corporations were only larger forms of the proprietary capitalist firms typical of the 19th century economy. They were now "big business," large enough to "monopolize" market price-making and withstand labor organizing, but still essentially capitalist. The transition to the corporation is still treated by many historians and leftists as a defeat for democracy, a triumph of the few against the many, and of conservative over populist-progressive forces. This view ignores the qualitative dimensions and the improved prospects for movements for social change that corporatization of the economy opened up.

Marx spoke to these qualitative dimensions when he noted that the advent of the corporation entailed "the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself." For Marx, corporations, "as much as [workers'] cooperative factories show how a new mode of production naturally grows out of an old one, when the development of the material forces of production and of the corresponding forms of social production have reached a particular stage" and "should be considered as transitional forms from the capitalist mode of production to the associated one [Marx's term for socialism]."[12] These thoughts suggest that Marx was still open to new theorizing of the transition to socialism. But such suggestiveness remained thinly developed until Martin Sklar's argument that socialism developed in the womb of capitalism not merely as potential but as a distinct mode of production much like capitalism developed side by side with feudalism beginning in the sixteenth century. Sklar called this co-existence and intertwining of socialism and capitalism, "the mix" [of capitalism and socialism].[13] Using the 300 year development of capitalism within and alongside feudalism as an model, we might extrapolate that the transition from capitalism to socialism might take a like number of years instead of happening in one revolutionary swoop and might be manifested in hybrid forms of capitalism and socialism just as feudalism and capitalism intertwined in changing ways between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries.[14]

The thesis that the corporation was a mix of two modes of production, a new social formation conducive to the success of social democratic politics and policies has two parts to it: first, the corporation *socialized* (that is, took people outside of the household economy and individual ownership and into associations of interdependence and cooperation) property and its functions without abolishing capitalism. In addition to mergers eliminating the property of competitors, the act of incorporation separated the *ownership* of property from its operation by splitting it into innumerable shares of stock that were sold at small sums not just to the rich but to the growing strata of middle-income earners acting as money-lenders. In his 1914 tour de force, *Drift & Mastery*, Walter Lippmann observed that, "The trust movement is doing what no conspirator or revolutionist could ever do: it is sucking the life out of private property."[15]

At the same time, the operation of corporate firms was put into the hands of managers, deriving their incentive not from returns to their ownership stake but from their salaries. The large corporate firm consolidated production into a vast bureaucratic operation, controlled by a cadre of professional managers overseeing new functions like personnel management, advertising, and research and development, while scientific management reconstructed the very nature of work itself. Corporate managers rationalized, that is socialized, the corporation according to the latest in cooperative knowledge developed and taught at the universities.

Finally, the corporation socialized market competition by holding prices above the competitive level, including the level needed to assure profit, what institutional economists term "oligopoly" or "monopolistic competition." That allowed managers to largely replace the hidden hand of the market in pricing and planning and allocating investment. Corporations became price-makers rather than price-takers.[16]

Our second point distinguishes between socialization and socialism. Socialization is an in-between state in which social relations are poised to take the leap into socialism, but often remains driven by capitalist imperatives. Socialism is simply the governing of the web of interdependent relationships according to the common good, whose content is liberty, equality, and justice for all. But, there is no a priori reason why such a governing principle cannot co-exist with other governing principles, that is that socialism has to be an all or nothing state or happen all at once.[17] To govern the corporation—with its separation of ownership from control—for the common good does not require nationalization or collective ownership of the means of production. It only requires that its operation be governed to one degree or another and in one way or another for public purposes. Put differently, the new social distance opened up between corporate property and its operation opened up the possibility of operating corporate firms with more and more public control without yet fully abolishing its capitalist uses. To the degree that this has happened, the modern corporate firm has become, to greater or lesser degree a *partnership endeavor* between two different modes of production, a terrain of both cooperation and contention over the different uses to which the margin above the competitive price could be put. Let me offer four major examples of this.

In the first decade after the great corporate merger wave an important sign of this struggle occurred when discount stores, department stores, and mail order houses began to undercut the manufacturers' suggested retail prices by discounting prices and substituting cheaper imitations for brand named goods, thus dragging down manufacturer's inflated profit margins. The expanded income generated by corporate market control was making its way into the hands of consumers. To counter this, manufacturers and smaller volume local retailers formed an alliance called the American Fair Trade League to champion the principle of "resale price maintenance." Mass retailers with the support of the American Federation of Labor and the General Confederation of Women's Clubs organized a progressive opposition and successfully resisted the League's proposed legislation.[18]

Another instance of how socialization could go in either a capitalist or socialist direction or a combination of both was labor's movement for industrial democracy. At the turn of the century, employers had tried to eliminate workers' restrictions on output and increase productivity. What was known as scientific management would transfer the skill and knowledge of craft workers to the new managerial elite. Though many craft unions resisted such capitalist imperatives, others proposed a bargain by which employers would accept collective bargaining and shorter hours, in return for which the union leaders would persuade their members to embrace scientific management. The modus vivendi legitimized corporate control of the workplace by making it rule-based and cooperative. Unions won grievance procedures, detailed job descriptions, including seniority rights, in other words, a kind of workplace rule of law in the large corporations. What the noted labor historian David Brody has called "workplace contractualism" didn't begin to take hold until World War I and was never fully accepted until the advent of mass production unionism in the late 1930s.[19]

A more prominent form of the mix has been government regulation. The corporation was conducive to regulation because it replaced the hidden hand of market competition with the visible hand of managerial planning. The old self-regulating market had been justified since the early 19th century as a private institution that ensured the public good. Once the market lost its price-making power, government intervention could be justified as a way of assuring that the new corporation was rendered compatible with democratic standards. These legal and political imperatives resulted in large-scale federal government intervention following the corporatization of the economy in areas like railroad price-setting, assuring pure food and drugs, central banking, and conservation of natural resources. In the new regulatory regime, government typically acted as a watchdog through commissions to ensure that corporate price-making and its investment allocating power was not abused. This combination of corporate control of markets with government oversight was the new principle established during the Progressive Era under the Woodrow Wilson administration.[20]

Self-identified social democrats almost always were disappointed with the mix as it developed in mainstream politics and government legislation. Most wanted to use government commissions to plan and directly manage corporations in ways that would subordinate the management of private business to the state. Though there were experiments early in the New Deal in this direction, the non-statist or "liberal" corporate "settlement" of the Progressive Era held firm. What was new to the mix in the 1930s was the enactment of universal social insurance and the adoption of Keynesian deficit financing of government spending. These were the fourth ways that social democracy piggybacked on the mix. Though many left-wing historians have followed historian David Brinkley in classifying this development as a conservative "accommodation with capitalism" because it prioritized economic growth over structural change, Keynesian deficit spending looks quite different when viewed from the standpoint of the mix.[21]

Deficit financing through the sale of treasury bonds tapped into the growing surplus of funds that business investment no longer required for growth. That surplus could be spent (spending includes tax credits) by government for social purposes (education, health care, child care, the environment, and the like), for military goods, or turned back to the largest taxpayers in the form of tax cuts as in supply side economics. The different uses of deficit financing, which were typically conjoined, cemented the mix as a political fixture in American life. Under President Ronald Reagan deficit spending tilted the mix toward capitalism, while Democratic presidents who increased social spending tilted it toward the socialist side, that is toward social welfare or redistribution. Often, social and military spending and tax cuts for the rich increased in tandem. Rarely was policy single-minded.

Nor should the goal of growth itself be viewed negatively. As the Polish Keynesian Michel Kalecki showed, accelerated growth that approached the level of full employment tilted the balance of class relations toward workers, undermined labor discipline, and aided labor organizing. Moreover, whatever the *uses* of deficit-financed spending, the mere fact that the government was doing it shifted the responsibility for growth from private investors to the government. By politicizing the responsibility for the state of the economy and clearing the way for democratizing economic planning and decision making, it undercut the public's dependence on the unilateral power of capital to bring prosperity.[22]

With this rudimentary understanding of the mix, we can now better understand an alternative theory of agency to the labor metaphysic. The movements and electoral coalitions to support consumers, workers' industrial democracy, and New Deal regulation and social spending were all *cross-class* in nature; they did not emanate from the working-class alone. More particularly, they were coalitions of segments from different classes, often including some corporate managers and bankers. Each coalition was constructed out of a hegemonic political ideology and discourse, in Antonio Gramsci's terms, "a historic bloc."[23] Successful progressive movements in the era of the mix have not been exclusively working-class movements arising from below that foisted change on a defiant capitalist class; nor alternatively, were they managerial initiatives from above that co-opted movement demands from below. They sometimes included both but were always more. They were components of larger movement complexes that transacted transformative change within the mix. Class conflict was and remains important, but only because it "generate[s] conditions and pressures for change of profound effect"; but it is "emergent cross-class alignments [that] transact them."[24]

On the Left there is much resistance to the theory of the mix. One progressive historian, when introduced to the theory of the mix, said that it reminded him of the suggestion during the latter stages of the Vietnam War that the United States should just declare victory and withdraw. In this view, calling part of our current reality "socialism," serves as a clever pretext for abandoning the ideal of a socialist future and withdrawing from the difficult struggle for its achievement, however long the odds. To many, the mix doesn't draw a clear enough boundary between what is and what should be, hence doesn't provide a strong enough standpoint to offer criticisms of and clear alternatives to, capitalism and liberalism.

To this, followers of the mix respond that the mix is superior as a description of actionable reality because it foregrounds the double-ness, the different and opposing tendencies conjoined within the present. There is no need to have a metaphysical faith in a socialist future because it already exists, partly as potential and partly as realization. The affirmation of what exists is not conservative to the degree that it finds there the basis and harbinger of a better future.

Many would dismiss the theory of the mix because it doesn't provide a standpoint from which to distinguish themselves from liberals and liberalism. To this, partisans of the mix plead partly guilty. Accepting the two-sided nature of modern political economy means that we must have one foot in the liberal camp and mainstream politics and the other foot outside it. Those who understand social democracy in terms of the mix believe that liberals and liberalism are not the enemy and that a non-antagonistic dialogue between liberals and the left/progressives is necessary to create a successful hegemonic coalition. President Joe Biden is only the latest in a long line of politicians deemed moderate-liberals who moved to the Left with alacrity and without apology when the times allowed it and their party demanded it. Theodore Roosevelt, FDR, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were all leaders of left-liberal coalitions that forged major change. To accept that such change will not necessarily abolish capitalism is not to give up the game, but is to abandon utopianism and apocalypticism. It is to accept that change in this era of transition is yet another provisional hybrid form in a protracted "long revolution."

There has long been a widespread mood of pessimism on the Left because the working class hasn't come close to fulfilling the exorbitant expectations assigned to it by the labor metaphysic. The reality that socialism has become severed from the class that was supposed to carry it to victory has not been replaced by a viable alternative. Both writers whose works are being addressed here neglect to discuss socialism or offer a path toward it out of the present. Cutrone repudiates social democracy to which he offers as the alternative only the incanted phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat." In Karp's article, socialism is never mentioned as a post-capitalist alternative, and if it exists, seems to be an inherent potential in working-class based politics. The alternative of the mix re-grounds socialism in the real historical world, takes the theory and practice of socialism out of the realm of the unspoken, the utopian, and the metaphysical, and restores the sense of possibility that our journey can be successful. **|P**

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[1] C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," *New Left Review*, 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1960): 18-23; Dan Geary, "The 'Union of the Power and the Intellect': C. Wright Mills and the Labor Movement," *Labor History*, 42 (Nov. 2001): 327-345.

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